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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000133

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/02  
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [VE](#) [PGOV](#)  
SUBJECT: Government Health Official Open to Scientific Food Safety Standards

REF: 9 CARACAS 493

CLASSIFIED BY: Randall Hager, Agricultural Attache, USDA, AGR;  
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to a scientist with the Ministry of Health's National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), technical level officials are willing to adopt food product trade rules based on sound science. Post believes that continued engagement on scientific matters could support bilateral commerce and develop relationships that would allow greater insight into the Ministry of Health, a key player in food trade regulation. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) According to Johan Puerta, a recently hired chemical engineer with the NIN, the entity that tests the safety of imported food products, technical level staff are eager to learn about and adopt international testing and evaluation methods used by Codex and other international bodies. Puerta indicated that food products in Venezuela are evaluated against a mix of national and Codex standards, and although he is not entirely familiar with Codex processes, he understands the benefits of following international standards and scientific trade rules.

¶3. (C) In contrast to SASA/INSAI (REF A), Venezuela's animal and plant health authority dependent on the Ministry of Agriculture, new hires into NIN are apparently not politically oriented. During a breakfast meeting with AgAtt, Puerta noted that the food import rules should focus only on safety and health.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: We have found in our limited interaction with government ministries that technical-level staff often appreciate the value of sound science and are more willing to adopt ideas that ultimately could benefit commerce with all trading partners, not just those that are politically cozy with Venezuela. Mr. Puerta's attendance at a Codex seminar in Lima, Peru in February, facilitated by USDA, could help achieve this goal.

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